

NOT WITHOUT TALENTED TEACHERS

Executive Summary

The schools in San Diego County that have the lowest student achievement also have the highest concentration of inexperienced teachers. These schools often have high concentrations of poor and minority students.

- Students in high poverty schools are two and one-half times more likely to have a new teacher than students who attend schools in more affluent neighborhoods.
- Almost 30% of teachers at high poverty schools are only in their first or second year of teaching, compared to just over 10% at affluent schools.
- The more “white” the student population at a school, the lower the chance of encountering a teacher new to the profession. A school with a 75% or more Hispanic student enrollment is twice as likely to have new teachers than a school with 25% or fewer Hispanic students.

There are schools in San Diego County that consistently have one-third or more of the teachers in their first or second year of teaching.

- New teachers accounted for more than one-third of the faculty for three consecutive years at 13 San Diego County schools.
- New teachers accounted for more than one-third of the faculty for two of the last three years at 32 San Diego County schools.

This is a serious problem for overcoming the achievement gap between low-income –and predominantly minority -- students and their peers. While an inexperienced teacher is not necessarily a bad teacher, concern arises when large numbers of teachers new to the profession are clustered together at a single school site.

- The quality of teaching (experience, ability, education) is the most important school-based variable for ensuring high academic achievement. The effects of even one poor or one good teacher are still reflected in student test scores two years later.
- Teaching experience brings with it greater capacity to help students learn. A high concentration of new teachers means there are fewer experienced peers who can serve as informal mentors.
- The job of the principal as an instructional leader becomes more difficult, as they are simultaneously challenged to coach and assist multiple faculty members who are new to the profession.

The problem is countywide but is greatest in San Diego City Schools.

- In the 1999-2000 school year, 4 out of every 5 schools with over 35% new teachers were in San Diego City Schools.
- In San Diego Unified School District, teachers can more easily transfer from one school site to another. Also, the more senior teachers have the first opportunity to apply for open positions, allowing them to more easily leave the schools that need them most.

The challenge for our educational system.

- Schools are being held accountable for low student achievement without the benefit of the quality teachers to provide sound instruction.
- High levels of teacher mobility frustrate professional development strategies, as freshly trained teachers leave the most challenging schools for other opportunities.
- The search for high-quality teachers is complicated by the reality that an effective teacher is expected to educate an increasingly diverse student body exhibiting a wide range of learning styles.
- Class size reduction has exacerbated a growing demand for new teachers, forcing schools to hire tens of thousands of teachers who do not meet minimum teaching qualifications.
- We need more new teachers, not fewer, but we need them to be adequately trained and equitably distributed across the region's schools.

There are several promising strategies to encourage an equitable distribution of quality teachers. Among them are:

- Community-based support systems, including the creation of local education foundations, which channel resources to high poverty schools.
- Investments in professional development concentrated in low-achieving, high poverty schools.
- Extra support for novice teachers, including dedicated mentoring by experienced teachers.
- Short-term monetary incentives for multi-year commitments at high poverty schools.
- Subsidized opportunities for continuing education, including the pursuit of specialized credentials, postgraduate degrees, and national-level certifications.
- The recruitment of very high-quality learning specialists, particularly in core subject areas such as reading and mathematics, to complement and support classroom instruction.